

Lecturing Economics in public and private higher education institutions: Competition or collaboration?

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ABSTRACT

The current changing education system is an important phenomena in South Africa (Klein 2017). This is evident at the level of primary, secondary and tertiary education. At primary and secondary education level, the changing education environment is evident by the growth in the number of learners attending private schools. The country also experienced an increase in the number of private higher education institutions (PHEI's)¹ offering degree programmes. Currently, South Africa has 26 public universities (Writer 2015) supported financially by the government and some 125 registered and provisionally registered private institutions that award degrees, diplomas and certificates. This latter number changes frequently as these institutions gain registration, loose registration or fail to move beyond provisional registration.

The aim of this paper is to compare the responsibilities of academics teaching Economics at a public university and a PHEI and use this as the basis for reaching general conclusions about similarities and the main differences between publics and PHEI's. This comparison is used to assess possibilities for collaboration and areas of competition between public universities and PHEI's; specifically in the field of the economics discipline.

Academics at public universities have to conform to serve as an academic citizen, teach and do research, while at PHEI's they mainly focus on the teaching element. This is one of the main differences between public universities and PHEI's. Among others, it is concluded that an academic that has been teaching at a PHEI for 5-10 years will face challenges in finding appointment at a public university owing to the difference in output requirements of staff by these institutions.

Key Words: Education, Economics, public university, private higher education institution.

¹ A private higher education institution may not be referred to as a university as yet. New legislation makes provision for private higher education institutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa's education system has undergone rapid transformation since 1994, with the concern of quality education being at the forefront of this change (Klein 2017). Accordingly, the demand for quality higher education has increased between 1995 and 2012. Cloete, Maassen, Fehnel, Moja, Gibbon & Perold (2006) show that South Africa saw considerable growth in the number of private higher education institutions (PHEI's) over this period, thus meeting some of the increasing demand for tertiary education. Over the same period, the South African government also announced the establishment of two public universities in the two provinces of South Africa that did not have a university before (Sol Plaatje University in Kimberly and University of Mpumalanga in Mbombela).

At the end of 2016, a number of 94 private institutions were registered, while 31 institutions were provisionally registered (Higher Education and Training 2016). This is a considerable increase from as far back as 1974, when South Africa had overall only 32 registered institutions, with the majority at that time being private institutions (Cloete *et al.* 2006).

This paper considers similarities and differences between these institutions to assess whether the relationship between public universities and PHEI's should be regarded as one of competition or collaboration.

Taking into account the main differences between the two types of institutions, one from the public sector and one from the private registered university sector have been identified to test the hypothesis. An analysis of the differences will determine whether public universities and PHEI's are competing against each other or rather serve as companions for the greater good of teaching, thus providing scope for collaboration.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section two compares salient features of PHEI's and public universities. Section 3 compares factors impacting on academic job satisfaction by evaluating the inputs and outputs of academics. Section 4 deals with aspects of the demand for the decolonisation of education. Section 5 deals with student intake. Whereas, the conclusions follow in Section 6.

2. COMPARISON OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AND PHEI'S

Despite the increase in the number of PHEI's in South Africa, their student numbers are still relatively low when compared to student numbers at public universities. However, the student numbers at PHEI's show rapid growth, particularly as quality education becomes a major factor of consideration, thus increasing the accountability of higher education institutions

(Romero & del Rey 2004). There may also be anecdotal evidence that the student numbers at PHEI's grew in the wake of "#feesmustfall" unrest at South African public universities (see for instance Essop 2016 on this matter). Lack of formal published student data contributes to this being unsubstantiated.

The main differences between PHEI's and that of public universities can be summarised as:

- The former is not subject to electoral (government) control (Gordan *et al* 2002);
- PHEI's are subject to regulatory control by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET);
- PHEI's have no obligation to publish research for state/subsidy funding; and
- Public universities are partly funded by the South African government through subsidies, while PHEI's are self-funded.

The difference in the funding model drives the academic offering of PHEI's. Owing to government funding, public universities can offer programmes in areas that are not financially viable on their own, for instance study in certain areas of the humanities or arts, albeit on the basis of cross-subsidisation within the university. This is not possible at PHEI's owing to the fact that all academic offering should be financially viable to ensure the continued overall financial viability of the PHEI.

Furthermore, academics at public universities have to render services as academic citizens and serve their community, whereas academics at PHEI mainly focus on the teaching and student support responsibility. Academics at public universities are responsible for teaching, publishing research papers and taking part in community services (Alabi, Murlala & Lawal 2012). Senior academics are also responsible for the mentoring of junior academics, although this responsibility is normally not highlighted separately, but included in either research or academic citizenship responsibilities. Conversely, staff at PHEI's are relatively young of age due to salary constraints at the institutions and therefore mentoring is subject to the knowledge and experience of "senior" staff members. The responsibility of mentoring "junior" lecturers are distributed among the chosen "senior" lecturers as each off them teaches/mentors the new staff on the different requirements and responsibilities of a lecturer.

Academic citizenship and community service represent the most unstructured contribution of academics at public universities. The distinction between the two can be described as follows:

- Academic citizenship is the *pro bono* service of an academic in the broader university, but outside any immediate direct teaching or research responsibility; and

- Community service (social responsibility) is the service of an academic outside the university to the benefit of the broader community and civil society.

For the purpose of the analysis and discussion in this paper, academic citizenship and community service are jointly grouped as “public service”².

With the core focus of PHEI’s being teaching, academics can focus more attention on the quality of education with the emphasis on teaching economics.

3. ACADEMIC JOB SATISFACTION / INPUTS AND OUTPUTS OF ACADEMICS

In the discharge of their teaching responsibilities, academics have to consider, among others, aspects such as the textbook used, additional teaching material, the mode of delivery to students, the assessments to be used, the number of hours preparing for a lecture, the number of students and student support, for instance by means of tutorials. These aspects can be seen as inputs used by academics and are present at public universities and at PHEI’s. Therefore, the assumption can be made that the input factors used for teaching economics are homogenous in nature³, across universities and higher education institutions.

The main distinction in demands placed on academics’ time at public universities and PHEI’s could be found in terms of research and public service, i.e. output factors. As is highlighted in the previous section, academics at public universities have to deliver on more output requirements than academics at PHEI’s. An academic at a public university has to teach, undertake research projects, write and prepare research for publication and render public service (AGCAS editors 2015). This requirement is increasingly becoming imperative for PHEI’s as per accreditation from the Department of Higher Education (CHE 2004), but not yet included for performance purposes.

The core focus and main output requirement of academics at PHEI’s reside in the teaching element as it needs not to adhere to the same regulations as a public university⁴. Therefore, satisfaction gained from teaching alone needs to be of high value towards job satisfaction for academics at PHEI’s. Shetty & Gujarathi (2012) stated that job satisfaction and job performance are positively correlated as suggested by behavioural and social science research. Job satisfaction levels obtained by academics may have a direct effect on the

² The term “public service” should not be confused with the services rendered by the government to the public.

³ The similarity in inputs does not take into consideration the differences in student numbers and preparation hours. For the purpose of the example, the factors of inputs are assumed to be similar.

⁴ See section 2 for the main differences between public universities and PHEI’s.

institution, including student development which, in turn, plays an important part in society and the responsibility towards the future nations and generations (Shetty & Gujarathi 2012). Academics at PHEI's should show higher job satisfaction from teaching than academics at public universities, as this is their core function.

To the contrary, the measurement of job satisfaction of academics at public universities should be measured over more output areas, given their broader scope of responsibility. This is a matter outside the scope of this paper, but is highlighted for further research in the comparison of public universities and PHEI's.

Studies have shown that individuals who are satisfied with their job are likely to apply more effort in their jobs than individuals who are unsatisfied (Shetty & Gujarathi 2012). This holds true for academics as well, irrespective if they are employed at a public university or a PHEI.

A core belief about job satisfaction is that satisfaction is essentially derived from the salary earned (Young, Milner, Edmunds, Pentsil & Broman 2014). Salaries earned by employees are positively correlated to job satisfaction (Dhanapal, Alwie, Subramaniam & Vashu 2013). According to a study done by Rynes, Gerhart and Minette (2004), salaries earned by employees are the most important motivator for job performance and employers who believe otherwise may underestimate the power of a well-designed compensation system.

On the other hand, Castillo and Cano (2004) believe that the level of job satisfaction does not only reside in the salary earned, but is rather based on the motivator-hygiene theory (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959), which states that job satisfaction is influenced by the recognition of good work done, achievement, increased responsibility and advancement (Young *et al.* 2014). Shetty and Gujarathi (2012) show that job satisfaction of academic members is subject to the content of the job, the work environment, chosen management style, interpersonal relationships at work and the organisation's culture and values. Furthermore, non-salary incentives may also include early or fast promotions or more leave days, and, specifically in respect to academics; a reduction in teaching loads, sabbatical/study leave, flexible hours and research allowances (Hicks & Adams 2003). Private-personal familial circumstances also play a crucial role in job satisfaction, but is excluded from this paper.

When considering the abovementioned factors relating to job satisfaction, the assumption can be made that most of these factors are desired by all employees, including academics at both public and private institutions. Therefore, only the factors that will indicate

a difference in job satisfaction between an academic at a public university and a PHEI are examined.

The factors examined to determine a difference in job satisfaction are:

- Salary
- Subjects taught
- Research output
- Working hours
- Academic citizenship
- Further education
- Job experience gained

It should be noted that these factors should be in balance with each other. Therefore, these factors should be looked at holistically and not separate from each other. These factors are illustrated below in figure 1.

Figure 1: Differentiating factors of job satisfaction among academics at public – and private institutions



Source: Own design

3.1 SALARY

The salary earned by academic is one of the determining factors in job satisfaction (Young *et al.* 2014 & Raynes 2004). A distinction should be made between salaries earned by an academic at a public university and at a PHEI. A comparison of the salaries of academics at lecturer-level (often the second-from-bottom academic grade at public South African universities) shows that a lecturer can earn a basic salary of around R360 000 per annum at a public university, while an academic at a PHEI earns considerably less, namely R250 000 per annum (Pay Scale n.d). This difference in salaries may indicate that the job satisfaction of a lecturer derived from remuneration at a public university is possibly higher than that of a

lecturer at a PHEI. This is however subjective, and other job satisfaction factors need to be taken into consideration.

3.2 SUBJECTS TAUGHT

The number of subjects taught by academics at a public and private institution differs. Academics at a public university focuses on one subject at mainly two different levels, e.g. macroeconomics at second year level and macroeconomics at honours level. To the contrary, a lecturer at a PHEI focuses on two to three subjects, albeit in the same discipline, e.g. macro- and microeconomics at first year level and macro- and microeconomics at second year level. Therefore, the assumption can be made that a lecturer at a PHEI has less opportunity to specialise in a specific sub-discipline.

3.3 RESEARCH OUTPUT

Another difference to consider between academics at public universities and PHEI's is the research output. All public higher education institutions are required to submit their subsidy funding claims for research outputs on an annual basis. These research outputs must be submitted to the DHET to qualify for research subsidy funding (Higher Education & Training 2014). Academics that teach at a public university are required to provide research output to "enhance productivity by recognising the major types of research output produced by higher education institutions and further use appropriate proxies to determine the quality of such output" as set out by the DHET (2014). Alternatively, academics at a PHEI are currently not required to produce research output and more time can be allocated to teaching and research within the subject taught. PHEI's will have to address this as an imperative for the future as research enriches the teaching offering of universities. With a research focus at public universities, academics can feed research results into teaching offerings on a continuous basis. Hence, the need for PHEI's to address this urgently.

3.4 WORKING HOURS

When looking at working hours of academics at public universities as opposed to that of academics at PHEI's, a distinction should be made between the hours pertaining to teaching a subject and the hours that include the other responsibilities of an academic. An academic at a public university works on average some 35-40 hours per week for a 30-week full-time academic year (DHE 2007). Thus, resulting in 1 200 hours per annum an academic spends on teaching, preparing for classes, marking scrips and consulting students.

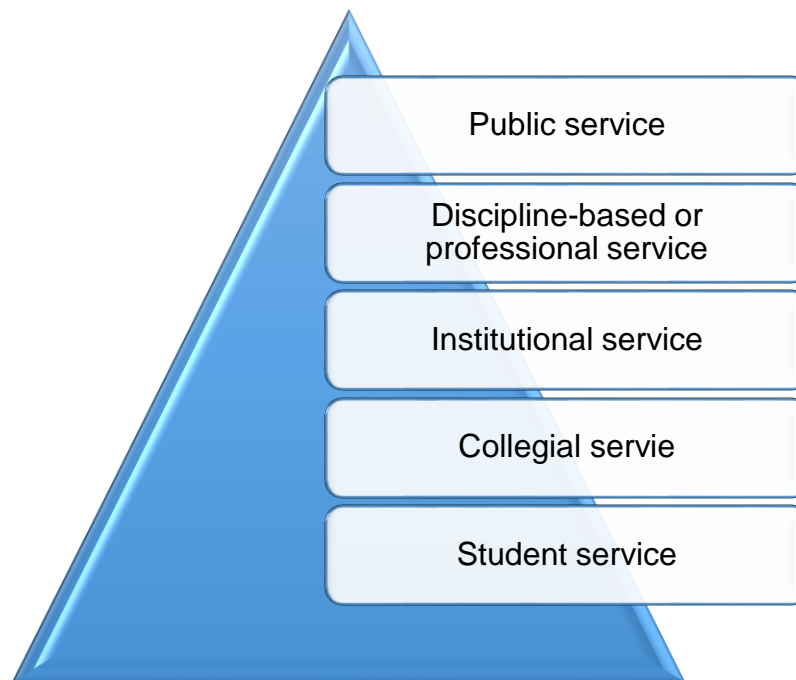
The working hours of an academic at a PHEI, specifically a distant education model of a registered PHEI, is set out as follows. It provides 11 contact sessions per subject per year of 50-55 minutes each, thus roughly 55 hours of teaching per subject per year. Preparation per class, as set out according to NQF levels, is a minimum of eight hours, resulting in 88 preparation hours per subject (DHE 2007). This amounts to 143 hours per annum spent per subject by an academic at a PHEI. Assuming that the academic teaches three subjects per annum, the working hours adds up to 429 hours per annum for teaching and preparation of these classes. Academics at PHEI's spend six hours on average per student per annum marking scripts and consulting with students. Furthermore, they are responsible for roughly 180 students on average thus, resulting in 1 080 hours spent. Academics annual working load expressed in hours is estimated at 1 509 hours per annum as set out according to the NQF level criteria.

3.5 ACADEMIC CITIZENSHIP

One of the responsibilities of an academic at a public university is to render public service to the community at large. The broader definition of public service, namely an academic citizen, is interpreted by Macfarlane (2007) as the "the duties, responsibilities or virtues of academics rather than students". He continues to say that some academics define academic citizenship as belonging to a group, a learning community. Also, "contributing, via scholarly activity and/or research, to the development of one's area of knowledge and being supportive of others in the same" (Macfarlane 2007).

Some of the responsibilities of being an academic citizen overlap for academics at public and private institutions. Macfarlane (2007) identifies these responsibilities as services in a pyramid formation.

Figure 2: The service pyramid



Source: Defining and rewarding academic citizenship: The implications for university promotions policy (Macfarlane 2007)

These overlapping responsibilities can be seen as *student service*⁵, *collegial service*⁶ and *institutional service*⁷. The major differences between institutions can be found in the *discipline-based or professional service* and *public service* responsibilities. Discipline-based or professional service require academics to peer review manuscripts for academic journals or provide feedback to colleagues on draft manuscripts for publication. Furthermore, public service (forming the peak of the pyramid) call for academics to interact with the media, business, and government or give public lectures. PHEI's are not required to perform these services, such as required by public universities.

⁵ Student service forms the base of the pyramid (Macfarlane 2007) and includes academic and pastoral responsibilities. This involves the caring for students by acting as a student counsellor, coaching students for job interviews, writing references for students, etc.

⁶ Collegial services include mentoring, observing teaching to better development, being part of "open-days", sharing material with colleagues (Macfarlane 2007).

⁷ Institutional services include memberships to certain committees, representing the institution at external social events, representing as a director of a degree programme and as a tutor (Macfarlane 2007).

The lack of discipline-based or professional service aspects in PHEI's is of particular concern: Given the growth in student numbers at PHEI's, it follows that the number of academics at these institutions will also increase. With no obligation to publish and do peer reviews of manuscripts, the implication is that the available pool of reviewers will decrease.

In an environment where academics at public universities are under increasing pressure to meet many objectives, public service is unfortunately the one area that academics will neglect in their quest to find time for the many challenges they face. This is already manifesting the inability of academic journals to find peer reviewers for research manuscripts within a reasonable time frame. A growing number of academics at PHEI's with no such responsibility will exacerbate this problem.

3.6 FURTHER EDUCATION

A factor that every academic is subject to in order to obtain higher job satisfaction through job performance is the furthering of knowledge and education. Academics are under constant pressure to further their education to obtain an advanced qualification with the aim of teaching at a higher level, i.e., academics teaching at first year level need a completed degree to do so, whilst masters level lecturers need a doctorate. This advancement in qualification also serves as a prerequisite for promotion and appointment at senior levels. An academic at a public university is required to have a qualification up to the doctoral (PhD) level in order to obtain a promotion. An academic at a PHEI is advised to gain higher qualifications to obtain a promotion or to improve career prospects in teaching students at more senior levels. Overall, academics may gain more job experience as their level of education increases, resulting in higher job satisfaction or, at least, experiencing less pressure for qualification improvement.

3.7 JOB EXPERIENCE GAINED

Academics at public universities have a clear career path, dependent on performance in teaching, research and public service, as well as the achievement of higher education/qualifications. The career path at public universities may be set out as follows: junior/assistant lecturer → lecturer → senior lecturer → associate professor → professor. Positions more senior than professor are administrative positions, for instance dean of vice-chancellor. Natural career progression for an academic at a public university is therefore a reasonable expectation to be promoted to the level of professor, given the achievement of qualifications and satisfactory performance in teaching, research and public service. Not all academics follow this progression, as appointments can be made at any of these levels when an application enters academe, depending on skills, experience and qualifications.

At PHEI's, as mentioned before, academics are quite young and so are some of the PHEI's. Therefore, the career path of academics at PHEI's are not set out as specific as at public universities. This, however, is a matter that is in the process of changing rapidly as most PHEI's move to university status and grow in staff and experience.

The job experience gained by an academic at a public university may outweigh that of an academic teaching at a PHEI when taking all the above mentioned into consideration. However, academics at PHEI's have more time to focus exclusively on the teaching element of the job and provide good quality education.

A conclusion can be derived that job satisfaction gained by an academic working at a public university or a PHEI is subjective in nature and depends on the wants and needs of the academic individually. Table 1 summarises employment aspects of academics at a public university and at a PHEI.

Table 1: Employment aspects of academics at a public university and at a PHEI

PERFORMANCE ASPECT	PUBLIC UNIVERSITY	PHEI
SALARY	↑	↓
TEACHING (ALL ASPECTS)	1 200 hours pa	1 509 hours pa
RESEARCH REQUIREMENT	Yes	Limited
PUBLIC SERVICE	Yes	Limited internally
• PEER REVIEW	Yes	No
QUALIFICATION IMPROVEMENT	Yes	Yes
MENTORING BY SENIOR ACADEMICS	Yes	Yes
CLEAR CAREER PATH	Yes	No

Source: Own assessment

The analysis in Table 1 shows clearly that academics at PHEI's will find it difficult to compete for jobs at public universities, given the near-exclusive focus on teaching at PHEI's.

4. DECOLONISATION OF EDUCATION

According to the *English Oxford Living Dictionary* (2017) colonisation is “the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area” and

decolonisation refers to “withdrawal from (a colony/a state), leaving it independent”. When considering the decolonising of education, it is necessary to take cognisance of the definition of education, namely (*English Oxford Living Dictionary*, 2017) “the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university”. Holistically then, the decolonisation of education means that a nation must become independent with respects to the attainment of knowledge skills, values, beliefs and habits (Wingfield 2017).

Decolonising curricula is a grey area and remains an area of discussion. When it comes to decolonising university curricula, the idea seems to involve the replacement of works from Europe or the global North with local theorists and African authors. This is intended to avoid African universities and South Africa’s education system from becoming mere extensions of former colonisers (Mgqwashu 2016).

The education system of South Africa is based on a curriculum framework as set out by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department for Higher Education and Training (DHET). A curriculum is a document drafted by curriculum specialists who are chosen by the government (Maluleka 2015). This provides government with influence to impose their beliefs and objectives within the curricula. In South Africa, this meant that the curricula would include political imperatives led by the governing party which would prove that they could govern a modern state.

In certain disciplines in South Africa, for instance accountancy, actuarial sciences, medicine and engineering, professional bodies prescribe certain aspects of curriculum that should be covered and/or methodology of assessment. Deliberations on decolonisation of education should therefore also include discussions with these professional bodies.

Modern states tend to centralise towards a tendency of forced one-language skill, despite what might be written in the constitution or other legislation of such countries. This created a process of standardisation as a central motive of modern states, which was run through the governing powerhouse. This led to the doing away of traditions and the old-ways-of-thinking, and replacing it with standardised and abstract spaces (Goosen 2016).

A cursory review of syllabi taught in economics at the two institutions under consideration shows that the students are exposed to basically the same academic material in economic, grounded in new-classical economic thinking. In both instances South African examples are used where relevant, rather than international examples, particularly in the study of macroeconomics.

Decolonisation of education is a matter that still requires considerable deliberation owing to uncertainty of intent or final outcome. This is one area for collaboration between public universities and PHEI's.

5. STUDENT INTAKE

Student numbers at PHEI's are on the increase, but at the same time student numbers at public universities also increase (Cloete *et al.* 2006). In terms of student numbers only, there is therefore scope for increased student numbers of both types of institutions. This is however, subject to an increase in capacity of these institutions.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there might be a shift of students with better matric results favouring PHEI's, albeit only in disciplines/programmes offered by PHEI's. However, clear trends in this regard will only emerge in years to come, as PHEI's become better established institutions. If this shift indeed manifests itself, this will become an aspect where public universities and PHEI's will face competition with one-another, similar to the current competition for students with better matric results between public universities.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper shows differences in the job deliverables/outputs of academics at public universities and PHEI's. Owing to these differences, it will be easier for academics to move from public universities to PHEI's. In the long run, academics at PHEI's will simply not be skilled in the areas of competence required by public universities when appointments are considered.

Decolonised education and progress towards a better and common understanding of such education, as well as the development of curriculum meeting this requirement are challenges facing all public universities and PHEI's in South Africa. PHEI's are considered to be businesses and are not subject to the same requirement. This challenge should therefore be addressed by the tertiary education system as a whole, rather than by individual institutions of even public universities and PHEI's separately.

The findings of this research can be summarised as follows:

Table 2: Public universities and PHEI's: Competition or collaboration

ASPECT	COMPETITION	COLLABORATION
STAFF	PHEI's vs public, not public vs PHEI's	N/A
DECOLONISED EDUCATION	N/A	Yes
TOP STUDENTS	Yes	N/A

Source: Own research

Although the research identifies one area for collaboration between public universities and PHEI's, the overall conclusion is that these two types of institutions will be in increasing competition in years to come.

One unexpected conclusion of the research is the finding in respect of the peer review of manuscripts for academic journals. The increasing inability of academic journals to find peer reviewers for research manuscripts within a reasonable time frame has already manifested itself and a growing number of academics at PHEI's with no such responsibility will exacerbate this problem. This is indeed an area for further research.

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